

**TESTIMONY OF NEW BRITAIN MAYOR TIMOTHY STEWART, PROPOSED BILL NO. 80**  
**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2007**

Thank you for allowing me to speak this morning regarding Proposed Bill No. 80, AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH CAMP LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS AND CERTAIN BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OPERATING "DROP-IN CENTER" PROGRAMS.

As mayor of a city in which our Boys and Girls Club serves more than 2,800 youngsters, this is an issue of great concern to me. The Boys and Girls Club of New Britain began operating on March 10, 1891, providing a place where boys could participate in sports, recreation, and learn basic skills that they would use throughout the remainder of their lives.

The Mission Statement of the club is "to promote the total development and well-being of the youth. To achieve this the Boys and Girls Club of New Britain encourages members to participate in recreational, educational and social activities so as to develop:

- Self-confidence and self-respect
- Responsible members of their families and citizens of their communities
- Capabilities for leadership and team play along with positive values and purposeful lifestyles."

I would point out that these services are provided without regard to social, economic, racial, ethnic, or religious background.

Throughout its history, the Boys and Girls Club of New Britain has produced many of our city's future leaders who themselves have become supporters of the mission of the club. In short, the Boys and Girls Club is one of the most important institutions in our city, helping to offer our youngsters a safe haven and an atmosphere that promotes good citizens.

One of the most important functions of the club is the "drop-in center" program which is designed to provide a safe place for boys and girls to gather for a few hours in order to socialize and interact in a constructive atmosphere. This is one of the club's most successful and popular general activities.

The program is run throughout the year but is particularly popular during the summer months when youngsters are looking for a safe place to "hang out" and to enjoy the social interaction with their peers.

In recent years, state officials have decided that this program at the New Britain Boys and Girls Club should meet all the rules and regulations of youth camp licensure during the summer months, a requirement that would place an insurmountable burden on the finances of the club.

Clearly, the drop-in center program at the Boys and Girls Club of New Britain is not a youth camp in the traditional sense. It is operated in a building located in one of our inner-city neighborhoods and youngsters come and go as they please. It is different from a camp setting in nearly every aspect. Re-

quiring this institution to meet the standards of a youth camp makes little or no sense and would lead to disaster for the program and for the youngsters who participate in it.

Currently the entire staff of the club consists of 11 full-time staffers, 17 part-time staffers and a group of loyal volunteers who oversee the activities of the 2,800 members. Adherence to the youth camp licensure requirements would necessitate the hiring of scores of new staff members to meet the staffing guidelines established in state regulations. This would create a hardship that would essentially bring this most valuable institution to an end. The boys and girls who participate in the drop-in program would be left with nowhere to go. A situation that would only lead to trouble for many of these children.

Proposed Bill No. 80 would amend the general statutes to exempt from the youth camp licensure requirements any Boys and Girls Club that is operating as a drop-in center provided that the city or town in which the club is operating such a program is deemed to be comparable to any such city or town program run for child safety. As Mayor I can assure you that this program is comparable to our city's present summer programs except that the participants are not required to stay for a defined length of time. Also the institution would be required to comply with any applicable pool safety requirements, fire safety and health codes and the program would be limited to only members of that Boys and Girls Club.

I can personally attest to the Clubs compliance with the Connecticut State Fire Safety Code as I previously inspected the facility annually for the Day-Care licensing requirements and expansions to those programs over the years.

I cannot express strongly enough my support for this important proposed legislation. Passage of this bill will enable the New Britain Boys and Girls Club to continue to provide a safe haven for the youngsters of our community. In the violent world which we see today, this safe haven for our youngsters to enjoy athletic, educational and social programs the Boys and Girls Club is one of the few places our children can gather without fear or intimidation.

I urge the members of the Committee on Public Health to support this bill, give it a Joint Favorable Report and send it to the Senate and House for passage.

Thank you for listening and I'll be happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding my testimony.